

Are Dogmas Important?

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THE teacher of religion soon discovers that moral lessons have a greater appeal to his students than dogmatic truth. He is made to feel, almost from the beginning, that Catholic dogma is not overwelcome in the classroom. Naturally, he is disappointed if he is a dogmatist and loves to revel in the surging beauty of dogmatic truth; but if he is a liturgist, he becomes spiritually disquieted by the negative response accorded the beautiful and meaningful doctrines connected with the liturgy.

He is not alone, however, in this disturbing experience of finding his students unfavorably disposed to dogma. The pastor who has a more specific charge of souls generally senses the same attitude in his congregation. Some want instruction; others want counsel; still others want to be emotionally stirred; and a few want to be scolded. But no one wants to listen to a sermon that he cannot understand—which is the laity's way of rejecting dogma. Moral instructions therefore find an attentive audience, but the presentation of dogmatic truth very often produces a negative reaction.

Both the professor and the pastor may well wonder what it is that makes the task of religious instruction so difficult. The question is sharpened to a very fine point when the professor reflects on the preaching of St. Paul, of the other Apostles and disciples, and all the Fathers, and on the attitude of their hearers contrasted with that of his students. For the first four centuries of the youthful Church, before persecution from within began, one is impressed by the elevated dogmatic tone employed by the then "teachers" of religion, and the eagerness of their "students." It is manifest that the faithful of that time were content only with a thorough understanding of their new state. They wanted to know just what it meant to be Christians, and it was only after they had acquired this knowledge that they began to determine their way of living, which they were able

to do, generally, of their own accord. It was during these first seriously honest centuries of the Church, then, that a proper relation was maintained between dogma and moral. Moral lessons were of course given. But it may be confidently said that the faithful were interested first in dogma, and secondly in moral, as a consequence of dogma. They were supremely conscious of the fact that "being" comes before "acting." And there is a scholastic principle that emphasizes their thought in the frequently quoted *agere sequitur esse*.

The general attitude of today is the direct opposite of that of the early Christian. It is believed now that being follows upon acting (*esse sequitur agere*); that one is a Christian if he acts like one. This improper conception has misled many to try living as Christians before they really became Christians—by baptism for the convert, and by conviction for those born in the faith. There is a mistaken belief that men must live worthily of Christ before adopting Christ. The exact reverse is the truth: they must be adopted by Christ before it can be possible for them to live worthily of Him. The former is the sad mistake of the human thinking that he can accomplish the superhuman of his own power. He forgets that men do not choose Christ, but Christ chooses men.

It may be assumed then that this strange perversion (*esse sequitur agere*) is the root of the difficulty now attending religious instruction. Students in Catholic educational institutions, as well as the faithful at large, are so seriously intent upon knowing how to live the life of a Christian that they overlook the more fundamental business of knowing how to be a Christian. The task of the instructor therefore is to teach them the relative importance of being over acting, of dogma over moral.

Were this simply a matter of changing the curriculum of studies, the instructor's work would be simple. Doubtless, this he must do. But he must also correct the false conceptions of his students regarding the relative importance of dogma and moral. This is difficult, for it necessarily implies a change of attitude toward dogma: aversion to it must be changed to love for it. How may this be done if the students lack the ability, so it seems, to grasp even the content of important dogmatic truths, without which it is im-

possible to arrive at any adequate perception of their inherent beauty? It is not an uncommon occurrence in the classroom that discouragement is born out of the utter lack of apprehension written over the faces of young men after an hour of sincere effort on the part of the instructor to expound such truth as incorporation in Christ, the super-life, Christo-centric and Theo-centric spirituality, the mediatorship of Christ, and the sacrificial-mindedness necessary for a proper coöperation in the central act of the plan of redemption. These are the shining dogmatic truths that illumine the way to a true conception of Christian being. Of greatest importance is the doctrine of incorporation in Christ, with its attendant consequences of membership in the Mystical Body. "Christianus alter Christus," said Tertullian. But the greater part of men, so it appears, cannot grasp this tremendous truth; they never become conscious of it.

Why is it that men are seemingly incapable of appreciating dogmatic truth? Surely it cannot be because their intellectual powers are objectively less than those of earlier Christians! The answer, then, must be looked for in their subjective application of those powers. What is it that absorbs their mind so completely that it colors their whole mental activity?

Some have essayed an indirect answer by indicating the drying-up process of materialism. One's eyes could not be constantly riveted on the earth without becoming unaccustomed to looking to heaven. But not everyone may be accused of greed and ambition. Some therefore have been somewhat the victims of the times. It is always true that one cannot live in a cold room without getting cold. And when nearly everyone had visions of wealth—which frequently became actualities—and when even those who didn't get rich could not keep from talking about it, the spiritual atmosphere became coldly dry. It must be admitted that in such an atmosphere dogma could lose its warmth of appeal, and men would no longer be interested in knowing what it meant to be Christians.

There are others who would lay all present spiritual ills at the door of rationalism. Beginning with the early Christians who had nothing more than the strict undeveloped deposit of faith, they proceed through the centuries, relating the instances of heretical doctrines which persecuted the

Church from within, pointing out how enlightened reason alone could master the situation in every instance, and how reason, overproud of its power, finally ran away with faith in the sixteenth and ensuing centuries, until at present, at least in some quarters, unenlightened reason calmly treads the boards. They thus succeed in establishing an attractive hypothesis. People have frequently attributed to men what was really the work of the Holy Ghost through men. It is quite possible to lose sight of the essential nature of the teaching Church, and, becoming involved in one's thinking processes, lose faith. And if faith be lost, or even weakened, the ability to grasp dogmatic truth would be considerably lessened. Even the acquired ability to reason logically is of little worth without the gift of faith. So the rationalist's attitude toward dogma and "Christian being" would very soon become similar to that of the materialist.

It can hardly be said, however, that either rationalism or materialism is responsible for all, or even for a great part, of the trouble. Very few people are downright materialists or rationalists. But perhaps there is just enough of the two in the modern person to make him an out-and-out individualist—and this may explain the difficulty. None know so well as the American people how much material independence has contributed to the transformation of men into selfish individuals utterly oblivious to the rights and needs of others when their own were concerned. At the same time, other peoples, perhaps more than the American, have undergone a similar transformation intellectually from the insidious effects of free thought. Now the modern man may be termed a product of the combined effects of this material and intellectual independence. He is a creature who has a secret desire to own things and think as he pleases. Figuratively, he belongs to a race of men who no longer know themselves little less than angels, but think themselves more than gods. He has shifted the center of the universe to his own little self. To him all things must come as to their final end, and from him all things must go out only to return with interest. He has become an individualist; he is completely absorbed in himself.

How evident this is in the several classes! The financial genius no longer holds his wealth in trust for others, but for himself; the statesman frequently represents himself, and

not his constituents; the author often writes for his own aggrandizement; the artist no longer looks upon himself as a contributor to beauty, or as a medium through which beauty could be made known to others; the inventor has ceased to consider it his vocation to alleviate human suffering; and the scholar looks for a lucrative position in a large university. Thus "individualism" in the social world.

But what of individualism in the spiritual world? That there is such a thing as individualism, and to an alarming degree, in the spiritual life of the people as well as in their social life, cannot well be denied today. Call it what you will, it is there. Men pray as though they, here and now, were the final end of their prayers. They pray that they may receive a hundred-fold in return. Private prayer has no longer any meaning outside the individual, and even public prayer, the liturgy, is forced into an unnatural position to accommodate the "individual." All in all, the faithful still want to be saved, but they want to save themselves, somehow independently of the mystical, and therefore, social Christ.

Even in a matter of such tremendous import as salvation, men are trying to be individualistic. And as an indication of their vain attempt, it may be said of the greater part of them that the one thing of which they seem to be the most incapable is giving themselves. They cannot quite make up their mind to let themselves go completely. There is a drawing back in all their efforts at prayer that manages to withhold the better part. Frequently, the thought of giving never enters in it at all. The spiritual life is looked upon rather as a receiving business, a mere willingness to accept, a profitable business. (This is not contradictory, be it noticed, to the above statement that men cannot adopt Christ, but must let Him adopt them. What actually happens is that Christ draws them to Himself by prevenient grace, but leaves the actual surrender to be freely made. The faithful must give themselves. Man is endowed with free will, and even God will not do violence to this prerogative in him.) Here then is the fruit of individualism when it is transferred to the realm of the spirit. Just as men are wrapped up in themselves socially and intellectually, so they are spiritually. They make themselves the grand terminal in the spiritual world as in the social world, to which, and out of which,

all things must come, and go. And this selfishness, this inability, in other words, to really give without thought of receiving, augurs an ignoble soul, a certain coarseness, the absence of a benign generosity, and a dearth of humility. All of which the individual tries to cover up by sporadic outbursts of action. He knows that he has not given himself to Christ, which is the only thing that can establish true Christian being in him, but he will try to act as though he had, nevertheless. Thus acting comes before being, moral is preferred to dogma, and it may be said that men are no longer intellectually capable of grasping such a truth as incorporation in Christ, because in ceasing to be spiritual spendthrifts, they became intellectual misers. Thought comes naturally only when it is profitable to the individual.

The writer is convinced that this is one of the reasons for the present lack of interest in dogma among the laity in most instances. There are exceptions, of course, and many of them. But it remains true that the faithful generally regard dogma as mostly for privileged people, and of little profit to themselves. The profit motive runs through their spiritual life as it does through their social and intellectual life. They like to hear, for instance, that good works will be rewarded, but they do not care to be told that they are other Christs, that they belong so completely to Him that they should have only the will of Christ, because this requires of them that they cease being individualistic. And they are loath to even think of ceasing to live in themselves and beginning to live in Christ, and letting Christ live in them.

The Ethics of Contraception

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NUMBERS of the laity, Catholic as well as non-Catholic find the Church's teaching on birth-prevention not only hard to follow in practice but also hard to justify in theory. One of the most difficult and most urgent tasks which confront the clergy of today is to convince ordinary lay-folk of its intrinsic reasonableness: a difficulty which is experienced more especially by those priests whose sphere of labor is in "educated" circles. It is in the hope of offering some suggestions to these that the following pages are reproduced.

Contraception can be considered from many angles—medical, psychological, economic, political, historic, artistic. But in the last analysis, the problem narrows down to the question of right or wrong—to a question of ethics, the science of the goodness or badness of human acts in themselves and in their entirety.

In their entirety. An exhaustive survey of the moral issue would involve a detailed examination of all other issues—medical, psychological, economic and the rest. For clearly, if contraception proves to be not wholly satisfactory from any of these points of view, it cannot be, without qualification at least, wholly right or ethically defensible. A judgment on the rightness or wrongness of any course of action must take into account all its circumstances and all its aspects: a complete account of the ethics of birth-prevention cannot ignore its repercussions on the individual and society, repercussions which we have expert authority for believing to be exceedingly injurious. The evidence is fully summarized in such works as Dr. de Guchteneere's "Judgment on Birth Control." But we are not here concerned with it. Our attention must be confined to a consideration of the rightness or wrongness of contraception *in itself*.

For it may well and truly be argued that, however injurious were the widespread and indiscriminate use of contraceptives, there *are* individual cases where such considerations have little force, in which, even if these factors come

into play at all, the evils resultant on contraception, whether to the individual or to society, are negligible compared with the evils which will arise if contraceptives be *not* employed. It is impossible to ignore such cases, and we are not concerned to pretend that the physical and social evils attendant on pregnancy may not, in certain cases, considerably outweigh those attendant on contraception.

Now to that we reply, with the Pope, that no motive however admirable, the avoidance of no physical evil or suffering, however dreadful, can justify contraception, because contraception, we say, is *wrong in itself*; the end cannot justify the means; and contraception is a means of its intrinsic nature evil and sinful. It is to this assertion, which many find quite shocking, that I will confine my attention.

We Catholics know that this is the formal and solemn teaching of the Church. We may accept it, indeed, on faith. We may, moreover, as do many non-Catholics, feel it instinctively to be true. And we may assert, and in some measure prove, that such an instinct is a right, natural and universal instinct which only sophistication, induced by powerful propaganda, can efface. But we have the right and duty to attempt to justify this faith, this instinct, and to interpret it rationally. For we do not hold that the sinfulness of contraception is a mystery transcending human thought. We hold, on the contrary, that it is a truth of natural law, in itself discoverable by human reason unassisted by divine revelation. There is, then, a call on us to attempt to give some rational justification for our convictions. We have to show that instinctive misgivings regarding the lawfulness of contraception are no mere survivals of traditional prejudices or irrational tabus, but conform strictly to sound reason, common-sense and rational ethics. We have to show that the Church's condemnation is not the invention of a new sin: that it is not *only* a revealed teaching, but an inevitable logical conclusion from elementary conceptions of right and wrong. The faith of the apostle of Catholic Action must be a *fides quærens intellectum*. Our compliance with Divine precepts will not be a mere blind obedience with the will doing violence to the intellect, but an understanding, whole-hearted acceptance of the Divine plan. We have, moreover, to equip ourselves to be able to explain our position to others and to be able to remove misapprehensions and misinterpre-

tations. It would be idle to pretend that the task is altogether a simple one. Rational ethics is an abstract and difficult science. Cold logic can give us little to grip the imagination as does, for instance, the neo-malthusian's dramatic portrayal of "hard cases."

Our first task is precisely to remove these misapprehensions and misinterpretations. For these we cannot entirely blame our critics. We must admit, I think, that the Catholic position has not always been very happily or even accurately stated by well-meaning but ill-equipped apologists. Their mistakes, serious though they sometimes are, are readily understandable. It is not easy at once to give good reasons for what one has always taken for granted. It is easy for the uninitiated to apply the technical terms of Popes and theologians in non-technical senses: there alone may be found a source of considerable misunderstanding. But, excusable as they may be, it is difficult to calculate the harm already done by these misinterpretations, and the occasion they have given to our critics to mock, and some of our own people to doubt and even to fall away.

One of the greatest misfortunes is that the neomalthusians have been permitted the almost undisputed use of the euphemism "birth control" as a synonym for contraception. Many, knowing that the Church condemns contraception, have assumed from this that she thereby condemns all rational control of parenthood, and have from that concluded that she anathematizes eugenics *en bloc*; that she encourages indiscriminate propagation without reference to the exigencies of health, of society or even of morality; that she asserts the absolute right of all married couples to have children whenever they feel inclined; desiderates quantity rather than quality in propagation and even encourages or permits irresponsible reproduction of the unfit. It must be asserted emphatically and proclaimed on the housetops that this is a complete travesty of the Catholic position. The first and most elementary postulate of our ethic is that all human activities must be subjected to right reason. The more important the activity, the more imperative the control. And parenthood, being among the highest and most responsible of human functions, more especially demands the control of reason. The Church certainly asserts conjugal rights, but like all rights they have their corresponding obligations and

must be subordinated to the general welfare of all concerned and of society at large. Nothing can be further from the truth than to suppose that the Church encourages instinctive, indiscriminate breeding of all and sundry. Marriage, itself, it has been said, is itself a method of birth control; and the Church has constantly asserted the necessity of conjugal chastity, which is precisely the virtue of regulating intercourse and reproduction according to the requirements of right reason.

It must, however, be noted here in passing that admittedly, quite apart from the lawfulness of the methods employed, the good Catholic's conception of what constitutes right reason in regulating parenthood will differ fundamentally from that of many advocates of contraception. The reason being that he cannot share their materialistic *Weltanschauung*, their egoistic philosophy of life. (It is because their whole outlook on life, their whole scale of values, is so diverse, that discussion on birth-control between Catholics and non-Catholics is often so inconsequential—they differ on birth-control because they differ on much wider and more fundamental issues and have so little common ground.) Many considerations, supernatural and natural, will induce the Catholic to favor fecundity, which, *ceteris paribus*, he will conceive of as itself a good and its contrary an evil. His Faith and his conception of life will incline him towards the large family for religious and many other reasons which cannot here be discussed. These, too, will be found wisely and frankly dealt with in such works as Dr. de Guchteneere's "Judgment on Birth Control" and in the Abbé Leclercq's admirable book "La Famille." But it remains true, in the words of the same Abbé Leclercq, that the ideal fecundity is a *rational* fecundity. The Catholic will not advocate the instinctive fecundity of beasts and savages, but he will hold it to be generally desirable for a man to have as many children as he can *reasonably* and healthily bring up, having in mind all the circumstances.

And, advocating a *rational* fecundity, he clearly will not wish to sacrifice quality to quantity. Many eugenicists, I believe, recognize that the two, so far from being opposite, generally go hand in hand. The large family can, *ceteris paribus*, be shown to be conducive to the well-being of the children who compose it, and, in spite of the alleged fecundity

of many syphilitics and defectives, it can also be shown that unhealthiness makes for depopulation. And here it must be said once and for all that, whatever one or two Catholic publicists may imply to the contrary, I believe that no reputable theologian will uphold that the irresponsible reproduction of the unfit is morally defensible. We sometimes hear applied to this the old tag—*Melius est sic esse quam non esse*—it is better to be lunatic or syphilitic than not to be at all. The tag is true when applied to the already existing—as an argument against infanticide, abortion, suicide, exposure. It is a dubious argument for the reproduction of the unfit, for the non-existent has no rights. There are no “rights of the unconceived child”; the parents, society, the Church, have rights to have children, but not, surely, children who are physically and spiritually incapable of taking their proper place in life. Such, at least, is the belief of reputable Catholic authors.¹ Similarly, although some Catholic writers in this country have expressed the opinion that “eugenics is stink,” that is no more than their personal opinion. It is very differently that the Pope speaks in his Encyclical.² He not only recognizes its general value, but also the imperative nature of eugenic indications in certain circumstances; though he, at the same time, insists emphatically that there are higher considerations (spiritual and moral) than physical and racial well-being, and that the former must never be sacrificed to the latter. Our ethics demand *quality* in propagation, precisely because, as will be seen, our sex-ethic is based on a high esteem of the creative significance of sex, and we must welcome all scientific research which tends to the amelioration of the race and the worthy exercise of sexual functions. If we look askance at or condemn certain eugenist measures it is because we know that the worth of a human being is not confined to physical health, and that higher values must not be set aside for lower.

We must now turn to consider another very widespread misapprehension. Many, realizing all that has been said, assume that our objection to contraception lies in the fact that modern contraceptive method is *artificial*, in that scientific technique is employed. Several facts seem to support this interpretation. We have seen that it is not the rational

1Cf. Leclercq: “La Famille,” p. 307.

2The subsequent Decree of the Holy Office on Eugenics which refers to the Casti Connubii, must evidently be interpreted in the light of that Encyclical.

control of propagation as such we object to it; nor yet, since the Church has always acknowledged the legitimacy of conjugal intercourse, even when conception is physically impossible, can it be that we consider intercourse as lawful only when pregnancy will actually ensue. Moreover, is it not as "unnatural" that contraception is condemned by Popes and prelates? It is, indeed, and what is thereby signified will be discussed presently. But whatever "unnatural" means, it certainly cannot mean "artificial." Contraception, or *onanismus* as theologians call it, is ages older than the most primitive contraceptives, and that is very old indeed. The use or non-use of scientific technique and instruments has nothing whatsoever to do with the intrinsic rightness or wrongness of preventing conception. Yet pages have been written to prove to us what a foolish idea this is; in which we are chastised for our inconsistency in cutting our finger nails, shaving, being operated on for appendicitis, and even for traveling in buses and trains. We readily agree that it is an idiotic idea—but it is not ours. We may readily agree that, given contraception, modern methods are vastly preferable to primitive ones. We will go further than our critics and assert that the antithesis of natural and artificial is meaningless when applied to man, for it is natural to man, as a being endowed with reason, to be artificial. It is his proper function to direct, harness, even, in a sense, overcome Nature by science and artifice. Which proves the point that when we condemn contraception it is not because modern contraceptive devices are artificial.

We must now turn from these necessary but negative preliminaries to ask: Why, then, do we hold birth-prevention to be intrinsically immoral and vicious? It is, says the Pope, because it is "a frustration of the marriage act," an "abuse" of sex, an "unnatural" sin in the strict technical sense of the word. Let us make no mistake about what that means. It means that contraception is in the same category with other sins called "unnatural" and for the same reason—with homosexual intercourse, self-abuse and the rest. And the reason is that it is like them a perversion, an abuse of the sexual act and consequently a positive destruction of sexual energy and activity.

If we turn to examine the case against these "unnatural" sins, as it is presented by St. Thomas in his "Contra

Gentiles," we find that it rests on two suppositions, neither of which is easily disputable.³ Firstly, that it is more or less wrong to frustrate or pervert *any* human act according to the importance and value of the act, because it destroys the right *nature of the act*. Secondly, that it is particularly wrong to frustrate or pervert the sexual act.

Firstly. It is wrong to frustrate or pervert any human act, more or less according to the importance of the act, and it may be added according to the degree of the perversion. Not only so, but sin is, in the last analysis, precisely that—the perversion of a human act. A human act is a purposive act, and to act for a wrong purpose is to pervert the act. In the case of purely mental processes this is pretty evident. To will the wrong thing; to think the wrong thing, is to pervert willing and thinking—to frustrate the purpose of will and thought. In the case of physical and biological processes this may not be quite so evident, but the principles are the same. Is it wrong, for instance, to cut my finger nails? Certainly not—unless it can be shown that the purpose of finger nails to grow *ad infinitum*. Is it wrong to be operated on for appendicitis, to cut out a cancer? No, indeed—that is not to frustrate the purpose of human functions, but to aid them and preserve the general health of the organism.

But let us take an example which, if fantastic, may be more to the point. It is an old idea, hardly to be gainsaid, that what sex is to the conservation and propagation of the species, that eating is to the conservation and growth of the individual. In other words, the distinctive and chief purpose of the human function of eating is nutrition. It may serve other very delectable and useful purposes, but if you deliberately frustrated all its nutritive value, you deliberately frustrate all its primary purpose of nourishing the organism; you are, in fact, acting against the nature of eating. Now let us suppose that, as we have contraceptives, so some enterprising merchant puts on the market "contra-nutritives" and people practice "contra-nutrition." (I say: "let us suppose"; but have I not seen advertisements for slimming nostrums which recommend themselves as inviting "no dieting, no exercises"?) Anyway, let us suppose these "contra-nutritives" which indulge at once the fashion-

³Book III, Chapter 122. Cf. "Summa Theol.," 2a-2ae, CLIV, 11 and 12.

able desire for self-starvation with the passion for lots of chocolates and other fattening foodstuffs. The contra-nutritive chocolate-eating will be perverted, frustrated eating—technically, a kind of gluttony—intemperance or immoderation in eating, because defeating the chief purpose of eating.

Intemperance in the use of sex is called unchastity or impurity, and the use of sex which defeats the purpose of sex is a graver form of unchastity. There is the unchastity which consists in using sex in the right way but with the wrong person or in immoderate measure. And there is the unchastity which consists in frustrating and perverting the sexual act itself by positively defeating its intrinsic purpose. This is *par excellence* “unnatural,” *contrary to the purposive nature of the sexual act*, and in this category we class contraception.

There is no call to deny that sex serves other purposes besides reproduction. But it remains true that the chief and distinctive purpose of sex, as distinct from other human activities and functions, is reproduction. So far as I know, nobody has dared openly to assert the contrary. It has, indeed, been darkly hinted, but without violence being done to all logic and all experience. (You will find a sample of the kind of thing I mean in Professor Crew’s contribution to Messrs. Gollancz’s “Outline of Modern Knowledge.”) But the facts are clearer to us than ever they were to the ancients and the mediævals. Biology has revealed the full complex marvelousness of sexual organs and functions, all admirably arranged to conduce to reproduction. But there is more in sex than a biological process and other aspects of it confirm the common-sense truth. Psychoanalysis bears witness, in the words of Freud himself, that “that which characterizes all (pathological) perversions is that they misunderstand the essential purpose of sexuality, namely procreation.” He adds: “We qualify as perverse every sexual activity which, renouncing procreation, seeks sex pleasure independently of it.” Medicine, as Dr. Fairfield has explained, reveals the deleterious effects produced by interfering with the natural effects of intercourse. Contraceptive research itself bears witness to this elementary fact, not only by showing the difficulty of preventing conception, but by revealing, as “Michael Fielding” admits, that no contraceptive has been found (nor probably can be found)

which fully responds to all the exigencies, physical and æsthetic, of the sexual act. Mrs. Naomi Mitchison's shattering pamphlet on birth-control should destroy all illusions on that score. And the fact that most advocates of contraception find it necessary to clothe their propaganda so thickly with sentimentality and moralizations seems to betray a certain lack of confidence in the natural attractiveness of the propaganda itself. But all these things are but confirmations of what common sense universally concludes from universal experience—that the ultimate effect and so the ultimate purpose of sexual intercourse is pregnancy.

I have said that the perversion or frustration of sex is a much more serious matter than that of other physical functions. Intemperance in sex is a very different matter from intemperance in eating or drinking. Not for the puritanical reason that it is defiling to touch pitch; but, on the contrary, because sex is so excellent and important, noble and ennobling a thing that any fooling with it, let alone frustration of it, is something like sacrilege. *Corruptio optimi pessima*. On that principle is based every sound argument for the particular sinfulness of sexual misuse as compared with that of other physical operations. Sex has a value and significance quite its own. The point can be argued in a variety of ways. Perhaps the best adapted to the minds of most of us nowadays, will be found in comparative analysis of sexual with other psycho-physical phenomena such as that undertaken by Professor von Hildebrand in the opening chapters of his "In Defense of Purity." He analyzes the peculiar qualities of sex, their "depth" as he calls them, as contrasted with the superficial character of other experiences. He shows how the use of sex is in a quite peculiar way ennobling of the whole man, and its mis-use correspondingly degrading. Or the same truth can be argued in more traditional fashion—with St. Thomas, who shows that the peculiar quality of sex is due to its peculiar creative power, and that sex differs essentially from other human functions in that it is ultimately productive of new life and hence exists for the benefit of society and not of the individual who is entrusted with it. Thus, he argues, the perversion of sex is particularly deplorable because it is the diverting of a public good into exclusively private use. Or, more profoundly still, the philosopher will argue with Plato that love

is creative and ever seeks to impart the image of the Beloved (also a thoroughly Thomist idea, by the way). He will see a particular fittingness that the physical consummation of the love of a man for a woman and a woman for a man should end in the procreation of their kind. And he will see a kind of blasphemy against that love when that consummation is deliberately frustrated. I will not attempt now to expand these reasonings. Suffice it to say that, whatever way we look at sex, and *really* look at *real* sex—not the sex-surrogate of the drawing-room song and the smoking-room story—it reveals peculiar values and significance which forbid all tampering with and abuse of it, let alone the wilful damming of its proper procreative energy.

In conclusion, I would add a few words correlating what has been said with the general and broad conceptions of rational and Christian ethics. It is only in this wider context that it becomes fully intelligible. One of the gravest and commonest misconceptions about our philosophy of life is that it is something quite negative. Because the Church asserts what seems to be a rigid moral code, couched largely in terms of prohibition, it is supposed that Catholic life is concerned exclusively with avoiding alleged evils; that our ethic is purely deontologist, that our morality is no more than blind obedience to the negative behests of Duty. This is utterly untrue. Eudaemonism is the essential characteristic of Christian ethics as it finds its most authentic expression in St. Thomas Aquinas. Self-realization is an essential element in the one ultimate motive of human endeavor and morality; or, in the more homely language of St. Thomas himself, God commands us nothing but what is for our own good and happiness; and happiness is the end of all moral human action. Catholicism is universal affirmation. The good Catholic is the man who is always affirming, and who denies only in order to affirm.

What this means is clearly exemplified in this very matter of contraception. The fundamental reason why contraception is wrong is that it is a *denial*; specifically a denial, a frustration of *sex*.

On the face of it that may seem absurd, because on the face of it it is the Catholic who prohibits and denies; the neo-malthusian who permits and affirms. It may be further argued that half a loaf is better than no bread, that con-

traceptive intercourse is better than no intercourse at all. Contraceptive intercourse, it will be said, with some truth, is not, after all, *wholly* sterile and uncreative; it is at least productive and creative in the sense that a kiss is productive and creative—as a physical expression of love. But the kiss, so far as it goes, is *wholly* creative—there is no frustration of creation in it. But contraception is *destructive*—destructive of the *specific* creativeness of sex. It is doing something positive to destroy good, and a great good; and therefore it is a great evil. It may be admitted that contraceptive intercourse is not, in the broadest sense of the word, wholly uncreative. But it is not its creativeness which is immoral, but its destruction; *not the intercourse that is condemned, but the contraception*. Contraceptive intercourse is the perversion of sex, counterfeit sex, ultimately futile and meaningless.

All this may seem very metaphysical and mystical and remote from the hard concrete facts which the advocates of contraception claim to contend. But it is fundamental to the student of scientific ethics, to the man who understands what is really meant by the “good life,” to the man who really understands what is meant by sex and love and consequently is nauseated by the contemporary “dirty little secret,” “swill it like a cocktail,” perverted, Hollywood idea of sex scourged by D. H. Lawrence. Above all to the Christian who understands his calling to coöperate with Divine creativeness, who realizes his oneness with the Source of all life and being and his uncompromising enmity to Abaddon the Destroyer. All sin is ultimately that—the spoiling, destruction, frustration of good, the abuse of creative activity. And contraception is sin, and grave sin, because it is the wilful abuse of the fullest and noblest of physical functions—sex, the fullest physical expression of creative love.

So St. Thomas, the Christian moral philosopher *par excellence*, succeeds where many other philosophers have failed—in perfectly harmonizing the claims of eudaemonism and deontology, the claims of happiness and obligation, of self-realization and law. His very eudaemonism makes his deontology no less absolute than Kant's. He knows that hedonism is incompatible with ultimate self-realization. Our own good is attainable only if destructive

evil is rigorously excluded and forbidden. He held that God created man for a purpose, gave him faculties, mental and physical, to realize that purpose; and that man realizes himself, attains happiness, beatitude—call it what you will—only in the measure that he fulfills that purpose, because his realization and perfection is that purpose. Hence the question of contraception falls under the general principle that all that is the contrary of realization is immoral. Contraception is the positive and deliberate act of destroying and frustrating the high and holy function of the procreation of man. Hence the chief Pastor of Christendom can say: "They are not to be considered as acting against Nature who in married life use their rights in the proper manner, although on account of natural reasons, new life cannot be brought forth." But hence also he solemnly and formally declares that "any use whatsoever of matrimony exercised in such a way that the act is deliberately frustrated in its natural power to generate life, is an offence against the law of God and of Nature, and those who indulge in such are guilty of grave sin," and that "no reason, however grave, may be put forward to justify" it.

STERILIZATION

My objection to sterilization is that it is infertile. Far from eliminating insanity and disease, it is in itself a great insanity and a great disease. Sterilization does not eliminate the insanity and disease of war, which is the fruitful mother of insanity and disease. It does not eliminate immorality, because it is in itself immoral, and immorality is the breeding ground of insanity, disease and mental deficiency. It does not eliminate social injustice and the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, because of which men decay in poverty, in unemployment, in the slums, breeders of disease and crime. It does not eliminate the social diseases, but in the opinion of the British Central Association for Mental Welfare, it turns back the sterilized on the community to become the carriers of the social diseases which are the causes of insanity and mental deficiency. It does not sterilize the insanity of the absolute State, which in denial of individual rights and the rights of God operates upon individuals as incapable of self-direction in a complicated social organism, and then returns them to that organism to guide themselves. It does not eliminate atheism and irreligion in which are radicated those vices which are the causes of crime and disease. The best and soundest program of eugenics is to strive for the elimination of irreligion, war, immorality, social injustice. The promotion of these objectives aided by sound and moral medicine, will promote the health, happiness, as well as the holiness of any race. It is only another way of saying that the Ten Commandments are rules of health and happiness as well as of holiness.—*Ignatius W. Cox, S.J.*

Big Shots and Little Shots

PETER MAURIN

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1. When the little shots are not satisfied
to remain little shots
and try to become big shots,
then the big shots are not satisfied
to remain big shots
and try to become bigger shots.
2. And when the big shots become bigger shots
then the little shots become littler shots.
3. And when the little shots become littler shots
because the big shots become bigger shots
then the little shots get mad at the big shots.
4. And when the little shots get mad at the big shots
because the big shots by becoming bigger shots
make the little shots littler shots,
they shoot the big shots full of little shots.
5. But by shooting the big shots full of little shots
the little shots do not become big shots;
they make everything all shot.